B. The Tribal Community

The scattering of the population over wide areas and their unstable manner of living, both a result of the climatic conditions of the country, has not permitted the social and civil life of the Hottentots to establish rigid norms. In addition, the confusions of the last years have swept away the ancient customs that had persisted until recently, so that a unified presentation of the social life of the Hottentots in their state and community is impossible today. The traveler [318] can only note those basic beliefs that he finds in his dealings with the natives which are still alive among the people even though they may not be publicly expressed. The little that I can report here concerns the Hottentots' views about property, sexual relations, and power.

1. Property

The only instances of private ownership of land probably occur only in the nara-fields of the Kuiseb region behind Walvis Bay. The hut is movable property and the so-called "gardens" were originally foreign to the Hottentot and do not count here. The usable stretches of land, the pasture areas, are common property of the families who have their cattle there. The right to this pasture area exists only as long as no stronger community contests it. Battles for pastures and cattle have been fought by the Hottentots among themselves from time immemorial. The lack of organization beyond the narrow tribal bounds has contributed greatly to the splintering of national power.

Within the tribe (another ethic exists in regard to the white man) private ownership of movable property, especially cattle, is sufficiently protected. Theft is considered a serious wrong and is very severely punished (see Power).

Repayment of a debt (again only among themselves) is considered a matter of honor but is often taken lightly enough: "Iaûs ga ǂarexa ota nî ra me tsi," i.e. When the rock-rabbit gets a tail (i.e. never), I will give it back to you."

In spite of the Hottentot's strictness in preserving his own private property rights, he is not at all miserly. He not only divides the last thing he has with his own people, he is (and was particularly so as all the older accounts testify) particularly hospitable to passing strangers. It would be superfluous to prove again that this hospitality was not based on a shrewd expectation of gaining some advantage, but on a deeply rooted feeling of brotherhood.

2: Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
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formerly a ewe was specially slaughtered for the occasion. This cooking is the first done on the fire since the girl entered the *kharu oms*. The *aba tarás* must hold her hand as she takes the pot, and aid her with everything she does. Soot from the pot is put on her forehead, and together the old woman and she eat a piece of meat prepared apart from the rest. So she is made free to cook and prepare a meal once more.[1] Then the *aba tarás* takes the fire, ashes and all, and dumps it far from the hut. She next sprinkles fresh sand on the hearth, and lays a new fire, which must not be lit from another, as is usually done when a fire goes out, but with flint or matches; originally no doubt the firesticks would have been used. The fire thus lit is no longer */nau*.

The girl is now ready to receive visitors as an *oaxuis*, a young marriageable woman. All her relatives and friends pour in, each with some present of beads, or earrings, or other finery. A great deal of this is only lent, and is returned later. The girl shines with clean, well-greased skin, she is scented all over with the *kuchu* she and her friends have ground, her face is painted in various curious patterns with red and white mineral powder mixed with fat, and her body is loaded with the presents. Then the young boys, even up to sixteen years of age and more, come into the hut from which they have hitherto been excluded, and go up to the newly-made *oaxuis*. She takes her "powder-puff" full of *kuchu*, and with it rubs each of them on his testicles. This ensures fertility and is a protection against sexual diseases. This particular rite seems to be dying out, and nowadays is accounted for by the saying that until the boys have been rubbed in this way it is too dangerous for them to eat any of the meat prepared for the girl. In consequence the younger boys especially go in eagerly, so that they may join in the feast!

The feasting reaches its climax this day. Female animals, both ewes and heifers, are killed, cooked, and eaten, and everybody, men and women, boys and girls alike, joins in this "feast of rejoicing". Hahn states that when the relatives appear for this final feast, the girl's nearest male relative (usually the eldest unmarried cousin) takes the fat of one of the heifers, hangs it over her head, and wishes that she

[1] The description of this part of the ceremony is taken from the version given by Mrs. Hayward in her more recent account ("Social Value of Water," 324). In the earlier version ("Conception of Issue," 72), she says that the cleansing of the girl and the change of clothing is made in front of the *inner* hut, i.e. in the outer hut, and goes on to say: "Meanwhile, a ewe has been slaughtered, and one of the hind legs is given to the *aba tarás*. This she must now cook on the fire in the house. . . When the meat is cooked, it is eaten by the *aba tarás* and other women who, like her, are past childbearing. No one else touches it."

2: Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
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421 unobserved by others, to use for himself.[1] And the various ways of acquiring cattle, as well as the internal trade which we have noted, all point clearly to the existence of private property rights. These [685] rights, moreover, are adequately protected. Theft, the furtive or forcible removal of goods belonging to another, is regarded as a serious offence, punishable by severe fines and ostracism, even by [426] flogging, while an incorrigible thief would formerly be killed.[2] The payment of debts, again, is an obligation of honour. If a man is unable to satisfy his creditors, a trustee is appointed to take over and divide his assets among them. He is allowed to keep a few goats and cows, whose milk he may use for the maintenance of himself and his family, but he may not slaughter these animals, for he is regarded as holding them in trust for the creditors.[3]

577 With all this strict regard for private property rights, greed is far from being a characteristic of the Hottentots. They not only share to 574 the utmost with their fellows, but are also very hospitable to strangers, traits favourably commented upon by many observers.[4] A man in possession of food shares, and is expected to share, it freely with others, and greediness in this respect renders him an object of public scorn.[5] Objects of common use are also readily given away temporarily, [685] and in the majority of cases even permanently. To take a goat from a man's herds for food, even in his absence or without his permission, is not unlawful, provided he is informed of the deed; on the other hand the taking of an animal in order to sell it is prohibited. This hospitality is a general custom arising out of the conditions of the country, where for long distances food is unobtainable, and it is based on the idea of reciprocity. No Hottentot need leave a stranger's hut

[1] "Das Recht der Hottentotten," 349.

[2] Kolb, op. cit., 156–7; Schinz, op. cit., 318; Wanderer, "Ueber Rechtsbewusstsein der Nation," 273; *Papers on the Natives of S.W.A.*, 74.

[3] *Papers on the Natives of S.W.A.*, 76; Richter, op. cit., 331–2.

[4] Cf. Kolb, op. cit., 155; Tindall, *Great Namaqualand*, 40; Wilms, op. cit., 134; Hahn, "Die Nama-Hottentotten," 305; von François, op. cit., 102; Schinz, op. cit., 318; *Papers on the Natives of S.W.A.*, 75.

[5] An extremely interesting statement of this principle is seen in the following entry made in his diary by Hendrik Witbooi, the famous chief of the //Hebenen:—

"Agreement dated 9th January, 1893:

"The agreement which I make with Francois Daniel Visser and with anyone who hires a farm from me is as follows:

"1. I charge him £12 per annum.

"2. If he follows his own customs on the farm and if he is unfriendly to the poor people and does not give them a bite when they come to him then I charge him £24 per annum.

"3. If strangers come to his farm and he is not hospitable to them but makes them pay for water and pasture, be they white, red, or black, then I charge him £36 per annum."

This document is signed by Hendrik Witbooi and witnessed by eight of his councillors. (Quoted by Kuhn, "The Diary of Hendrik Witbooi," *J. S.W. Afr. Sci. Soc.*, ii (1926–7), 57–8.)